

GROWING UP WITH DALLAS

The Life of Henry C. Clark

Charlyne Dodge



Henry C. Clark

Preface

Henry C. Clark was my husband's grandfather. Stories have been told through the years of Clark's life in the early days of Texas. All his grandchildren have listened eagerly to the tales of Grandpa Clark in the days of cattle drives and big ranches, and of the big house he built for his large family. Now the grandchildren have children of their own and the people left to tell tall tales of this early Texan grow fewer each year.

I never knew Henry Clark. Neither did I see the "big house" until it was an old, somewhat sad reminder of a bygone era. The old house is gone now, sacrificed to a modern age of expressways. Because I think it is important for his great-grandchildren to know something of the part he played in the early days of Texas, I want to tell the facts and stories about Henry Clark that have been told to me. This paper makes no attempt at completeness. If it had been written even five years ago, more information would have been available. My thanks to those who so graciously helped me by searching through old scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, and memories. As is always the case, memories differed about some events and dates, but I do not feel that the minor discrepancies are worth worrying about. The important thing is that Henry Clark was an interesting, independent man in a day which prized individualism and independence. This is what I want my children to know and be proud of.

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Henry Clay Clark was born in Dallas County in 1850, near what is now Carrollton. His parents and maternal grandparents were early settlers in Texas. His grandfather, David Myers, brought his wife and ten children to Carrollton in ox wagons from Lebanon, Illinois, in 1845 and established the first Baptist congregation in Dallas County. One of Rev. Myers granddaughters, Mrs. Homer Fisher, has kept records of this congregation which was organized with eight members in 1846.¹

One of the stories that must have been told to Henry Clark when he was a little boy was of an Indian scare the Myers children had once when their father and mother were off carrying the gospel through the wilderness of the Republic of Texas. The Myers had learned about Indians on the slow trip from Illinois and many Indians came by their cabin during the day to trade their handiwork for corn meal and peaches grown from the seeds that Leticia Myers had brought from Illinois.

The Indians were different at night, however. Often the same Indians who were so friendly during the day would come back by night to drive off stock. The Myers children had been cautioned over and over about what to do if the Indians should come while their mother

1. "City's Religious and Material Growth Go Hand in Hand," The Dallas Morning News, October 1, 1935, Sec. 6, p. 9.

and father were away. On this particular occasion when the children heard hoofbeats, Cleave, fifteen, led the way to safety. He pulled up one of the split logs in the floor and dropped down under the cabin. He was followed by Sarah, seventeen; Jemima, sixteen; Tom, ten; Mary, five; with George, thirteen, hurrying them along.

The children crawled along a gully toward a neighbor's cabin a mile away. Suddenly, a scream from Cleave broke the stillness and the frightened children knew the Indians had found them. Then their noses told them what had happened. Cleave had disturbed a skunk and had been thoroughly sprayed! From their cabin came a "Hellooo" from their father, who was returning home with guests. No Indians after all, but the children had been wise not to wait to be sure.²

Rev. Myers was often away from home for he traveled about the countryside, preaching under trees, in homes, or any place where a small group of settlers gathered. In 1848, the story is told, a dove flew down and perched on his shoulder for several seconds while he was preaching near Grapevine. During this meeting a church was organized and called Lonesome Dove.³

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2. Kenneth Foree, "Dallas Cynthia Ann," The Dallas Morning News, August 6, 1946.

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Henry Clark's father, Andrew J. Clark, came to Texas from Tennessee. There seems to be some confusion as to when he arrived. In an interview given to W. S. Adair of The Dallas Morning News in 1923, Henry Clark states that his father fought in the battle of Village Creek in 1841⁵; but in another article written by Kenneth Foree for The Dallas Morning News in 1946, the date of his arrival would seem to be no earlier than 1845. In Foree's article which tells that the Myers family arrived 1845, we find this statement: "One of those children was Miss Sarah, grown at seventeen and pledged to a tall young man, A. J. Clark, who was to follow westward."⁶ This date is substantiated by the following entry found in John Henry Brown's History of Dallas County, Texas, from 1837 to 1887:

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4. From an interview with Mrs. Hale B. Dodge, one of Henry Clark's daughters, October 2, 1960.

5. W. S. Adair, "Dallas Man Tells of Indian Fights," The Dallas Morning News, June 10, 1923, Sec. 3, p. 4.

6. Foree, loc. cit.

7. John Henry Brown, History of Dallas County, Texas, from 1837 to 1887, p. 68.

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part in it coincide so completely with other accounts found about this battle, however, that it is difficult to dismiss completely the possibility that A. J. Clark may have been here in 1841 after all. In Henry Clark's own words we find this account of the battle:

I, of course, heard much of buffaloes and Indians. I saw some of the settlers who fled from Parker County when the Indians raided that region. A number of them came as far as Dallas. My father was in the campaign against the Indians on Village Creek. The Dallas and Ft. Worth interurban crosses Village Creek a few miles west of Arlington and the battle took place, according to my understanding, not far from the crossing. Indian villages were strewn along the banks of the creek, and from that circumstance the stream took its name.

The Indians, who were defeated in the battle, fled in all directions, and, in order that as few as possible might get away, General Tarrant, who commanded the militia and who held that there were no good Indians except dead ones, divided his men into squads to pursue them. My father and nine others were in a squad commanded by Captain John B. Denton, a famous orator and Methodist minister, who had settled in the republic in 1836. This squad followed the Indian trail as far as the Trinity River, where they stopped to drink and to water their horses. Some of the men who had no hope of overtaking the fugitives were in favor of going back and taking a more promising trail, but Captain Denton declared that he was going to continue the pursuit till he ran the savages to earth. He had scarcely announced this determination when an arrow, shot from ambush, pierced him. After a single discharge of arrows, the Indians took to their heels. Captain Denton survived his wound but a few minutes. One other man, whose name has escaped me, was slightly wounded in the arm. The men wrapped the body of their dead leader in a blanket and buried it. In 1860 it was exhumed and given final burial on the Chisum ranch in Denton County. Denton County and the town of Denton were named for Captain Denton.⁸

8. Adair, loc. cit.

These kidnapping Indians came in the middle of the day while the men were out in the fields plowing. Only Leticia, her daughters, and the small children were at the cabin, but Leticia was capable of controlling the situation--she thought!

The Indians appeared to be a wedding party from the way they were dressed in beaded buckskin and silver ornaments. They were a merry group, chattering and laughing as they rode up to the house; nevertheless, the children scooted into the house as Leticia walked out to meet the chief. She talked with the visitors and gave them milk. Then the bride noticed Leticia's sidesaddle on the cabin wall and motioned that she wanted to take it down. Leticia shook her head because she knew that when an Indian showed interest in something he wanted it for his own. The bride pointed again; the chief nodded; the bride reached for the saddle. Strong-minded Leticia rapped the Indian girl's hand with the stirrup. The girl drew back, then reached again. Again, Leticia rapped her hand. This happened four or five times.

Suddenly, the Indians began mounting their ponies as if to ride off. Before anyone knew what was happening, the Indian chief swept young Henry up, jumped on his pony, and sped away.

One version of what happened next is that Sarah Myers Clark fainted. The other is that she ran after the Indians with a butcher knife. Of course, there was no chance that she could catch them, but she saw the chief hand her baby to the bride. Leticia acted quickly. She knew that the Indians might return for the saddle and kill them all, so she sent one of the boys to the fields for the men

and rushed the others inside the house. They barred the doors, got down the rifle and ammunition, and armed themselves with whatever else might be used as a weapon--ax, knife, poker, anything.

In a few minutes Leticia heard horses returning. She sighted the rifle through the logs in the cabin wall, but the chief had young Henry in his arms and she couldn't shoot for fear of hitting the baby. The chief rode up to the house, leaned down from his saddle, and set Henry on his feet. The Indian party rode away laughing. "It had been a great joke, a joke on the bride who said she would not have to be given a papoose, a greater joke on the white man who never knew how funny an Indian joke could be."¹⁴

Of course, this is not an epic like that of the Cynthia Ann Parker capture, but it is still exciting enough to be told to children and passed on to grandchildren for years and years.

Henry Clark went to the "big city" of Dallas for the first time when he was six years old. As he tells the story of his exciting day:

I saw Dallas for the first time in 1856. My father brought me to town and gave me a pair of red-top boots. Although the town was less than a year old it looked wonderfully big to me. The mare we rode on this trip must have been a good one, for I remember that my father refused an offer of \$100 for the colt that followed her. But my boots constituted the outstanding feature of the trip. I could hardly believe that they were mine. When I retired that night I put them under the bed and during the night I got up seven or eight times to ascertain if they were still there.¹⁵

14. Foree, loc. cit.

15. Adair, loc. cit.

Four years later, when Dallas was a village of 500, a fire broke out and almost completely destroyed the town. Three blocks were burned, but the concentrated efforts of the people saved the brick courthouse.¹⁶

In the winter of 1862-63 Henry went to school in Dallas. He boarded in the home of a Mrs. Keith, who had come from the deep South to stay in Dallas for the duration of the Civil War. He and several of his friends shared the "spare the rod; spoil the child" discipline and three-R instruction dealt out by Professor Henry Bishop in the Odd Fellows' Hall.¹⁷

So far as is known, this year in Dallas was the extent of Henry Clark's formal education, but his self-education was quite extensive. When he was twelve (probably after the year in school) he had rheumatism so severely that he could not walk. His father tied him on a horse and he read Shakespeare while he watched the sheep. How much a twelve-year-old boy might glean from Shakespeare may be open to debate, but it is quite probable that it was this experience that opened the door for Henry Clark to a life-long appreciation for good literature.

Henry was cured of his rheumatism in a typical frontier way. One day his father tied him on the horse and sent him to a neighbor's house on some errand. When Henry got there the man said, "Light and

16. Tom J. Simmons, "Incendiary Blaze Almost Wipes out All Dallas in '60," The Dallas Morning News, October 1, 1935, Sec. 3, p. 1.

17. Adair, loc. cit.

come in." Henry told him that he could not because he had rheumatism and could not walk. The neighbor told Henry that if he would spend the night he would cure him. Henry was put in a sack of wet salt that covered him up to his neck. When the salt dried thoroughly, Henry no longer had rheumatism.¹⁸

Dallas in 1866 is described as having six saloons, about as many blacksmith shops, but only one dry goods store.¹⁹ This may have been the dry goods store owned by A. J. Clark because he is said to have owned the first one in Dallas.²⁰ How long he owned the store, I do not know, but A. J. Clark took his family to Missouri when Henry was seventeen.

Henry stayed behind and began his career in the cattle business. He went to South Texas, bought cattle, and drove them up the Chisum Trail. Fortunately, we have a first-person record of Clark's experiences on the cattle drives and some interesting observations about the cattle themselves. He tells of the slow beginning the settlers in the Dallas area made in the cattle business and how they imported cattle from East Texas and Arkansas. He says that the original stock in this part of the state did not consist of native cattle. He also maintains that not all the longhorn cattle in Texas were descendents of the Spanish cattle. His reasoning was that the horns of any breed of cattle will grow longer from generation to

18. From an interview with Mrs. Walter J. Moore, one of Henry Clark's daughters, on December 3, 1960.

19. The Dallas Morning News, October 1, 1935, Sec. 3, p. 16.

20. From an interview with Mrs. Moore on December 4, 1960.

While Henry was in Missouri, he fell in love with and married Miss Susie Lawing. His family talked him into putting his money into land in Missouri, but the call of Texas was too strong and he soon sold his land and took his bride back to Dallas. Her mother never forgave him and always spoke of him as "that Henry Clark."²⁷

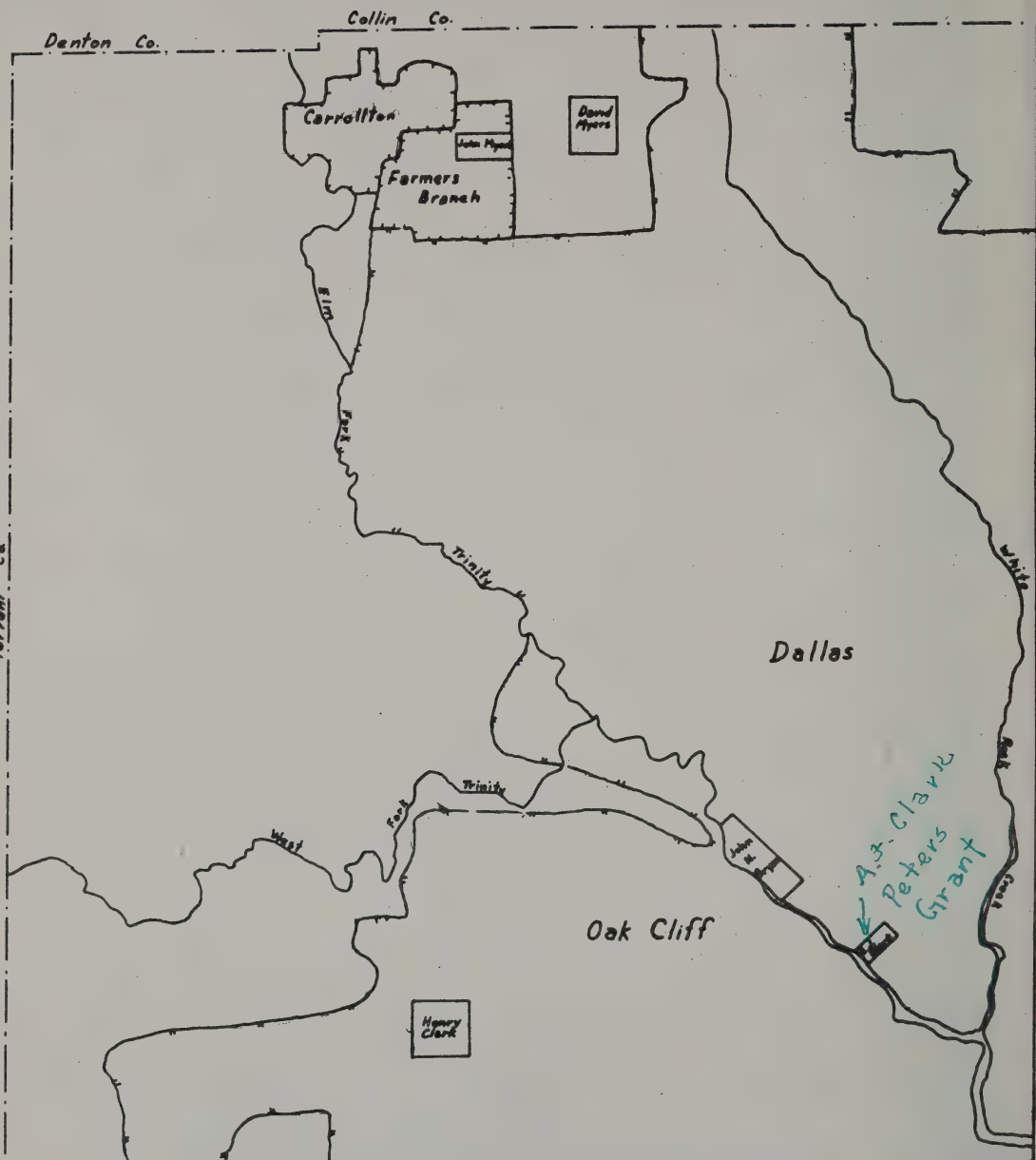
"That Henry Clark" provided well for his wife, however. He took out the 640-acre headright available to married men when he returned to Dallas (see map). Then began his active, prosperous years which in so many ways exemplified the early pioneers of our land. Beginning with very little but ambition and energy, Henry C. Clark built for himself and his family a name and background to remember with pride.

When Clark's first wife, Susie Lawing Clark, died in 1881, she left him a widower with five children (one child had died)--three girls and two boys. The oldest of the five was only ten. In 1882 Clark married Miss Maria Laceta Francks. Her father, J. N. Francks, a native of Paris, France, had a hotel in Dallas. Clark met Maria when he and his children ate at the hotel. She was only fifteen when they married; he was thirty-two. His oldest children were just a few years younger than she and the stories are told that Clark would come home many a day to find Maria climbing trees with her step-children.²⁸

These were busy, prosperous years for Henry Clark. He divided his time between his ranches and Dallas, where he settled his family and was active in real estate transactions. During these years,

27. Ibid.

28. From interviews with Mrs. Rice Wood, one of Henry Clark's daughters, and Mrs. Bronson, October 9, 1960.



The northwest part of Dallas County, showing the location of various land tracts mentioned in this paper and their relationship to the present-day cities of Carrollton, Farmers Branch, and Dallas.

Clark had ranches at Indianola and Palacios on Matagorda Bay, one in Knox County near the town of Goree, and one at Mexia. The ranch at Indianola was purchased after a terrible flood had devastated the area. He bought 7,000 acres for \$2 an acre.²⁹

As if these interests were not enough to keep him busy, Clark was also active in Dallas. The newspapers of the 1880's record an impressive list of his real estate activities. Among them were the following:

Dec. 9, 1884--H. C. Clark is starting a brick building on the corner of Elm and Harwood streets that will be a credit to the location.³⁰

March 31, 1885--H. C. Clark yesterday sold to Sanger Bros. his large two-story stone building on Commerce near Murphy street, occupied by Armstrong Brothers, wholesale grocers, for \$25,000.³¹

Sometime in 1887 --Henry C. Clark will commence next week laying a foundation for a brick and stone residence to be built on Seventh street between Eads and Greenwood avenues at a cost of \$15,000.³²

This last excerpt deserves special mention because the house Henry Clark built in Oak Cliff for his family was a showplace in its day. It was the third brick house in Oak Cliff and cost \$35,000 by the time it was completed and furnished in 1889. The walls were of

29. Ibid.

30. "Dallas and Texas 50 Years Ago," The Dallas Morning News, Dec. 9, 1934.

31. "Dallas and Texas 50 Years Ago," The Dallas Morning News, March 31, 1935.

32. "Dallas and Texas 50 Years Ago," The Dallas Morning News, exact date unknown.

*The Henry Clark residence in Oak Cliff,
completed in 1889.*



hand-made Mexican brick and were two feet thick. With sixteen-foot ceilings, nine fireplaces with the woodwork of the mantel matching the wood of the furniture in each room, rugs from Belgium, and curtains from Switzerland, it is easy to see why it would be considered outstanding. There were two pianos, two organs, and an elevated stage for the use of orchestras when the Clarks had a dance.³³

In 1885 Clark was one of those who contributed \$1,000 to bring The Dallas Morning News to Dallas from Galveston.³⁴ The consolidated State Fair was opened in October of 1886 and Clark was one of the original stockholders.³⁵ The greatest expansion during these years, especially 1887, was west of the Trinity--in Oak Cliff. Henry Clark was active in the development of this suburb. He and a partner opened the Simpson-Clark Addition south of Ervay and Forest. They had great plans for this part of Oak Cliff, but after the Panic of 1893 the town developed the other direction.³⁶

By 1893 Clark was close to being a millionaire, but the Panic of 1893 took most of his money. He set about to rebuild his fortune; but he refused to take bankruptcy because he considered it a disgrace to do so, and it took him almost ten years to repay his debts.³⁷

Henry Clark's character was typical of the rugged individualist we read about in accounts of the early days in Texas. He was an independent person who went his way alone for the most part, full of

33. From an interview with Mrs. Dodge and from a clipping from The Dallas Morning News, date unknown.

34. The Dallas Morning News, October 1, 1935.

35. From an interview with Mrs. Dodge, October 2, 1960.

36. From an interview with Mrs. Moore, December 4, 1960.

37. From an interview with Dr. Clark, December 25, 1960.

drive, ambition, and intelligence.

His children tell stories of his temper and his generosity. In a day when it was often considered a thing of pride to have an "uncontrollable temper," Clark gave vent to his without restraint when all did not go well. On the other hand, though, he was kind and generous in many ways. There was Manuel, who came to one of the ranches as a little lost boy. Henry Clark took him in and raised him. Manuel worked for Clark for years and named all his children after the Clark children.³⁸

Clark also raised the little colored boy who was his cook's son. She gave her son, Fritz Gordon, to young Henry Clark when she died. Clark brought Fritz with him from Missouri and he lived at the Matagorda Ranch. The Clarks spent their summers there and they have many stories to tell about Fritz. Once some of the older boys dressed Ross Clark up in a sheet to scare Fritz. Ross sneaked into the barn where Fritz was and frightened him so that Fritz' yell scared all the mules, too. The mules ran off with Fritz right behind them screaming, "Get out of 'de way, mules, and let somebody by who can run!"³⁹

There was never any doubt as to the head of the Clark household. Mrs. Hale B. Dodge, one of Clark's daughters, says that her name is H. C. because her father sent word to Dallas from one of the ranches just before she was born that the child would be named

38. From an interview with Mrs. Wood, October 9, 1960.

39. From an interview with Mrs. Dodge, October 2, 1960.

H. C. Clark, Jr. When the child was a girl, she was still named H. C., Jr.⁴⁰

Henry Clark was also a proud man and was even a little vain about his dress and appearance. He was sixty-two years old when Virginia, his fourteenth child, was born. He celebrated the event by dyeing his hair black. His daughter, Mary, tells of how he got too much dye on and came proudly home with black streaked down his forehead. It must have looked terrible as it grew out, but he never dyed it again--just that one bold assertion of pride.⁴¹

Henry C. Clark died in 1924 when he was seventy-four. He was survived by his wife, eight daughters, and four sons. He had lived to see the Dallas area grow from a wilderness to a thriving metropolis. Indefatigable to the end, his last day was in keeping with his character. Most of the day he drifted in and out of a coma-like state. His daughter, Jessie, spent the day reading to him. When he would wake up he would grumble, "Well, go on--read, read." Jessie would tell him, "But you fell asleep, Papa." "Damnit," he would say, "I told you I'm going to die tonight and I want to know how that story comes out!"⁴²

40. Some of the other children remember that Mrs. Dodge got her name because Grandma Clark had always wanted to name one of the boys after her husband but he would not let her. She had made up her mind that this child was to be H. C., boy or girl. We have all heard the other version so long that it is part of the Henry Clark legend, so it is used in this paper.

41. From an interview with Mrs. Wood, October 9, 1960.

42. From an interview with Dr. Clark, December 25, 1960.

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